

**Value:** *Too many people today know the price of everything and the value of nothing.* —Ann Landers, advice columnist

# The only guarantee of quality is us

Many of you are now aware that the Honolulu Engineer District has begun to align its business processes to something called the "ISO 9001:2000 model." Briefly, ISO (the acronym means "International Organization for Standardization") seeks to apply a "plan, do, check, act" model to work. An example of a business process already in the District which is based on this model is our After Action Review (AAR) process. The intent of our efforts under ISO 9001: 2000 is simply this: to delight our customers. We think we can do this better if we fortify what we currently do with the "plan, do, check, act" model.

I know what you're thinking. "Is this Total Quality Management (TQM) in a different wrapper?" Or perhaps, "Is this another management fad someone read in a book written by some guy (or gal) who has never set foot on a project site, or designed even a mailbox?" To some degree, I share these concerns, and here is why:

Regardless of the processes we adapt to help us ensure we deliver quality work, quality ultimately depends on us. There is no magic formula out there to guarantee quality! There is no special flow diagram, no fancy process manual, and no magic wand to guarantee we'll deliver quality work to our customers. I do believe that ISO 9001: 2000 will get us far, and I do believe it will be worth the effort to align our business processes to the "plan, do, check, act" model (many others are doing this, by the way). Change of this magnitude needs all the help it can get. But ISO by itself cannot provide the fundamental ingredient to ensure quality.

What is that ingredient?

It's "us." It's support staff who care enough to ensure they thoroughly staff every action, think it through, develop the best alternatives, and follow up to ensure the job is done properly. It's designers who stay abreast of the latest standards and codes, thoroughly back check documents, consider all review comments, and proudly state "this is my work and I stand behind it." It's project managers who ensure that the customer's wishes are known, who write a useable project management plan that everyone on the project delivery team embraces, and who work schedules and costs to consensus. It's field personnel, far away from "the flag pole," who carefully provide oversight of contractor work, ensuring specifications are adhered to and stopping unsafe practices on the spot. It's you and I responding to customer queries in one day, like we said we would.

What drives people to ensure their work meets these kinds of quality benchmarks? Is it a process manual? Is it a policy letter



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## Commander's Comments

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**”**

written by the District Engineer? I believe the answer is more people-oriented than that. Although knowing what the standards are for your job is vital, the answer has to come from within. I do think the only guarantee of quality is our own desire to commit to achieving quality results—no matter what we do—for our customers. For our internal customers. For our external customers. For ourselves.

What does the District look like if we don't have the desire to achieve quality? In one way, it's like a boat. When we're all in that boat, we're all headed in the same direction. When we're all focused on providing quality to our customers, everyone shares the load, we know where we're going (our azimuth!), and there's movement toward getting there.

This boat, however, is not a perfect craft. What happens when some of the people on board don't care about quality is that the structure weakens and the boat leaks. There are some real gushers coming up through the planking. We spend time bailing it out. We have less energy to move forward. The leaks—the "quality leaks"—distract us from where we want to go, and what we want to do. We lose sight of our customers; we begin operating in crisis mode and quality gets set aside.

Experts say that it is much, much easier, and far less expensive to prevent quality problems before they occur. This thing called ISO 9001:2000 will help us do that. But it will only go so far: quality ultimately depends on us.

Are you committed to doing quality work? You can only answer this yourself. You can answer "yes" if you see yourself in some of these statements: "I know my job and am doing it to the highest levels of service." "I'm going to get this done right...no shortcuts that erode quality." "Even when no one is looking, I will do the right thing to deliver quality." And finally, "I still care."

I know most of us don't want to be in a leaky boat. And, we all know that our customers won't tolerate a "leaky boat" for long. I hope you will join me in a personal commitment to achieving quality, wherever you work and whatever you do in the Honolulu Engineer District. Remember: the only guarantee of quality...is us.